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verb preposition combination

ambiguous combination of a verb and a preposition, whose ambiguity is due to its variable constituency.

Verb-Präpositions-Kombination

ambige Kombination eines Verbs und einer Präposition, deren Ambiguität auf der Variabilität der Konstituenten beruht.

Examples of ambiguous verb-preposition combinations are *talk to*, *quarrel over*, *deal with*, *ask for*, *stare at*, and so on (cf. *Langacker* 1987: 435). The fact that these combinations may be followed by an NP (as in (1)-(3)) raises doubts as to how their constituent structure should be properly described:

- (1) The manager is *talking to some reporters*.
- (2) They always *quarrel over women*.
- (3) Martin didn't dare *ask for another promotion*.

(Examples from *Langacker* 1987: 435)

On the one hand, the fact that verb-preposition combinations like those in (1)-(3) can occur with a postponed NP may be taken to indicate that these combinations could be analyzed as consisting of a complex verb (a unit consisting of a verb and a preposition) which takes an NP as its object. Evidence for this analysis comes from the fact that these [V P] units have a specialised meaning and from the possibility for the prepositional object to passivize:

- (1a) *He was talked to at great length.*
- (2a) *She's the sort of woman who is always being quarrelled over.*
- (3a) *Was it specifically asked for?*

(Examples from *Langacker* 1987: 436)

On the other hand, word order phenomena suggest that the preposition may also be analyzed as forming a constituent with the following nominal:

- (1b) *It was to the deputy chief executive assistant that I finally managed to talk.*
- (2b) *They fight constantly over money and politics, but over women they never quarrel.*
- (3b) *For what is he most likely to ask?*

(Examples from *Langacker* 1987: 436)

Within the framework of Cognitive Grammar, the grammatical behaviour of the relevant verb-preposition combinations is regarded as being derivable through two alternate compositional paths (cf. *Langacker* 1987: 436):

- (i) V and P are integrated at the first level of constituency to derive a composite transitive verb, whose primary landmark – i.e., most salient profiled participant apart from the figure in a relational profile (the trajector) – corresponds to P. This landmark is then instantiated or “elaborated” by a direct-object nominal at the second level of constituency.
- (ii) P and the NP are first integrated to form a PP. This composite expression then elaborates a relational e-site within V at the second level of constituency. (The term “e(laboration)”-site refers to those facets of one component structure in a valence relation which another component structure serves to elaborate.)

Both orders of composition have been conventionalised and are represented in the grammar by schematic units describing multilevel constructions.

References

- elaboration site (Cognitive Grammar)
- Landmarke (Cognitive Grammar)
- Trajektorie-Landmarke Organisation (Cognitive Grammar)

Literature

- *LANGACKER, R.W.* [1987] Foundations of Cognitive Grammar. Vol. 1: Theoretical Prerequisites. Stanford, CA